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SUBJECT: SUMMARY OF RUSSIAN MILITARY ACTIVITIES IN
ABKHAZIA: APRIL - JULY 2008

¶1. (SBU) Summary: The Ambassador attended a July 22 meeting at the MFA by NATO Ambassadors. A paper prepared by the Ministry of Internal Affairs was distributed, summarizing Russian military activities in Abkhazia this spring. The paper is not classified, but the MFA asked that it be treated as sensitive because of some of the sources of information. End summary.

Begin Text

¶2. (SBU) Putin's Decree:

-- On March 6, 2008, Russia withdrew from the 1996 CIS agreement prohibiting governments inter alia from military relations with Abkhazia.
-- On April 16, 2008, Russian President Vladimir Putin issued a decree urging the federal government to establish direct relations with the de facto authorities of Abkhazia and South Ossetia

¶3. (SBU) Increased Number of Peacekeepers:

-- Before April 29, 2008, the number of Russian peacekeepers deployed in Abkhazia amounted to roughly 2000 soldiers.
-- The Russian government claims that by May 4, 2008 the number of their troops in Abkhazia increased up to 2500, but according to our information their real numbers exceeds official data.
-- On April 29, 2008, the Russian peacekeeping contingent deployed in the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict zone increased greatly:
-- An echelon of 30-32 wagons crossed the Georgian-Russian Border near the river Psou by railway carrying 26 units of camouflaged armor vehicles, among them: BMD vehicles, D-30 type howitzers etc.
-- The echelon had 4 additional passenger cars, carrying soldiers from Novorossiisk military base.
-- The military vehicles were unloaded in Ochamchire. One part of the soldiers and armament was sent to Tkvarcheli district and another part to Gali district.

¶4. (SBU) Deployment of Airborne Troops:

-- The PKF units recently deployed in Abkhazia also include a joint battalion (545 soldiers) of the Novorossiysk and Pskov Airborne Division, thus violating the 1994 agreement.
-- They are stationed in village Okhurei of Tkvarcheli district and Reka of Ochamchire district and are patrolling at checkpoints no. 402 and no. 403 (near villages Arasadzisi and Akamara). This fact was further confirmed by Russian official newspaper "Krasnaya Zvezda" on July 9, 2008.

¶5. (SBU) Deployment of MOD GRU Unit

-- Approximately 250 Chechen members of Vostok and Zapad battalions of the Main Intelligence Unit of the Russian Defense Ministry have been deployed in Abkhazia.
-- Currently they are patrolling in Gali district (Gudava and Primorsk villages) and at checkpoints no. 208 (Meore Otobaia village) and no. 109 (Sida village)

¶6. (SBU) Russian Deployment in Abkhazia

-- In April-June, according to our information Russia has additionally deployed in Abkhazia approximately: BUK air defense system, 50 aviation specialists, 30 military experts, 100 communication and antiaircraft defense experts, 40 D-30 type howitzers, 10 BM-21 "Grad" systems, 20 Shilka ZU-23-2/ZU-23-4 AA guns, 120 anti-tank missiles and 2 MI-24 helicopters.

¶7. (SBU) Building New Check-Points:

-- On May 1, 2008, new illegal checkpoints were opened on almost every strategically important road in Ochamchire and Tkvarcheli districts, among them at Nakarghali, Arasatsisi and Akamara.
-- In violation of the 1994 agreement, the Russian side does not allow Georgian and international observers to monitor their locations, including the Bombora military base in Gudauta.
-- Russia is currently operating checkpoints at the following sites: Nakargali, Otobaia, Nabakevi, Pichori, Chuburkhinji, Dikhazurga, Saberio, Lekukhona, Muzhava, Rechkhi, and Akamara.

¶8. (SBU) Shooting Down Georgian UAV

-- On April 20, 2008, at 10:00 AM a Russian fighter plane entering from the Russian Federation attacked and shot down a Georgian Unmanned Flying Vehicle "Hermes-450" above Gagida village in Gali district.
-- This fact was further confirmed by the UN special investigation.

¶9. (SBU) Railway Troops

-- On May 31, 2008, the Russian Ministry of Defense deployed

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400 soldiers of Volgograd's 76th Unit of Railway Forces in Abkhazia.

-- These forces are preparing railway platforms for transportation of military equipment and construction materials from Sokhumi to Ochamchire, even though there is no economic activity in Ochamchire today.
-- Russian authorities accuse Georgia of preparation to war, while they themselves prepare infrastructure for military purposes.

¶10. (SBU) Russian Non-Peacekeeping Troops

-- Currently Russian non-peacekeeping forces are stationed in the following places: Ochamchire, Babushera, Bombora, Akamara, Sokhumi, Tsebelda, Okhurei, Gagra and Lata.

¶11. (SBU) Bombora Military Base

-- At present, Russian military units and equipment are stationed along with Abkhaz separatist forces at several military bases.
-- Bombora (Gudauta): By mid-July 2008 several hundred more soldiers and 44 military vehicles were observed at the Bombora military base, which should have been closed according to the Istanbul agreement of 1999.
-- With Russian assistance, three large barracks are being rebuilt at the Bombora military base, waiting for deployment of fresh forces.
-- On June 6, 2008, several "SU-25" and "SU-27" type fighter planes (armed) were detected at the Bombora military base in Gudauta.

¶12. (SBU) Ochamchire Military Base

-- Ochamchire (Seaport): On April 17, 2008, several "Ural" trucks carrying 300 Russian contract soldiers entered the military base in Ochamchire seaport.
-- On the same day, one "ZIL-131" military vehicle with 2 units of antiaircraft system ZU-23 and 15 containers with shells, as well as four GAZ-66 vehicles with special communication equipment was deployed there.
-- On May 3, 2008, 5 units of 120mm artillery systems and several antiaircraft defense systems BUK-M1 were located at the military base in Ochamchire seaport.

¶13. (SBU) Okhurei Military Base

-- Okhurei: Approximately two months ago, with the help of Russian specialists, the construction of Okhurei military base in Tkvarcheli district was finished.
-- On July 8, 2008, additional Russian soldiers, 4 BTR-70 and 4 BRDM type military vehicles and several anti-aircraft systems were deployed at the base.

¶14. (SBU) Sokhumi Military Base

-- At present, the Russians are rebuilding the military base in Sokhumi's Maiak (lighthouse) settlement.
-- On April 30, about 40 train cars entered a railway station in Sokhumi loaded with various types of armament, part of the cargo was taken to Maiak military base, and another part to Tsebelda mountain battalion.

¶15. (SBU) Antiaircraft Defense

-- On May 3, 2008, antiaircraft defense system BUK-M1 were deployed in Abkhazia

¶16. (SBU) Abkhazia Defense Minister's Comment

-- In his July 7, 2008 interview with Russian information agency "Utro", de-facto Minister of Defense Merab Kishmaria declared that, "Russian instructors prepare Abkhazian soldiers. I pay them according to contract...We are just doing this without publicity".

¶17. (SBU) Russian Officials in Abkhazia

-- On April 30, 2008, former head of Russia's peacekeeper's staff, Aleksandr Pavliushko was appointed de-facto Deputy Minister of Defense by a decree from Abkhazian de-facto President.
-- Since March 2005, Head of General Staff of Abkhazian de-facto Ministry of Defense is Anatoly Zaitsev, a high-ranking official of the Russian Ministry of Defense.

¶18. (SBU) Detainment of Illegal Weapons

-- On June 17, 2008, Georgian police detained a military cargo, mainly consisting of 20 anti-tank guided missiles, which the Russian peacekeepers were covertly transporting to Zugdidi base without any official documents specifying the origin or destination of the cargo.

¶19. (SBU) Military Trainings in North Caucasus

-- On July 15, 2008, large-scale military trainings unprecedented for the last 20 years "Caucasus-2008" started in the North Caucasus Military District (NCMD).

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-- Airborne units from Pskov and Novorosiisk are conducting operations near the Roki and Mamisoni mountain passes, right at the Russian-Georgian border.
-- 8000 soldiers and 700 armored vehicles from NCMD participate in these trainings: airborne units, air force units, antiaircraft units, Black Sea and Caspian Sea Fleet, Federal Security Service and Internal Troops of the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

¶20. (SBU) Eliminating Armed Grouping

-- On September 20, 2007, special task units of the MIA of Georgia neutralized an armed grouping of 10 people in Kodori Gorge, which has planned an attack on the new road connecting Upper Abkhazia with the rest of Georgia.
-- The commander of the grouping and his deputy were killed in an exchange of fire.
-- They were identified as: Igor Muzavatkin - Vice-Colonel of Russian armed forces, former member of the Collective Peacekeeping Forces, who served on a contract basis in the border troops division of the Abkhazian separatist security service; and Artur Zorin - Major of Russian armed forces, also former member of the Collective Peacekeeping Forces.

¶21. (SBU) Possible Target - Kodori Gorge

-- Increase in the number of Russian soldiers, military equipment, military trainings and intelligence activity near

the Kodori Gorge indicates the interest of Russian forces.
-- The proof for this was an attack on Georgian police
officers near Achamkhara Mountain who were patrolling the
gorge on July 9, 2008.

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